

[John and Susan Wright]

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John and Susan Wright.

Three and one-half miles east of Lakeland, on State Highway [#?]17 there is a truck farmer located about one-half mile off the main highway along side of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. (Route [#?]2 Box 72 E.) In this quaint old house live John and Susan Wright and his two grandchildren.

The occupants receive a welcome blow of the whistle from all trains that pass by in the day, from the engineer, fireman and brakemen. One passed while interviewing, and the engineer gave a short blast. John said, "Lawdy you see they all know me."

This place is typical of most places found in this settlement, where the land is low but found to be very rich and produces good crops. There is a small school building near by which is crudely built like the rest of the house- shutters for window glasses, and an ancient interior with long wooden benches for the children to sit on.

John's location has been cleared on the north side of the railroad, but across the railroad there is swamps and wood land with plenty of timber on it. John was very anxious for

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me to see what he had on this spot. After crossing the railroad we entered the wooded section. Here, he had a cleared the ground under the tall pines, and there were collards, mustards, and cabbages growing. "You see I put plenty od soda to 'em and up they come." He stayed in front so you would not accidentally step on his many traps that he had set out in the underbrush. They had the appearance of a machine gun nest hidden in the wooded land. Here John carried on his trapping, catching coons, possums, rabbits, and anything that 2 gets in the way of the traps. He stopped after more than twelve such consealed traps appeared from nowhere.. " You see there is more ways than one to make a living. I'se good knowledge of all dis wood land, and wid all dese' wild animals running 'round, I fix to ketch 'em. You know there is a law 'bout trapping, but it is for those dat get caught." John was full of smiles while displaying his wit.

On returning across the track, one sees a shanty crudely built, one story high, weather-boarded, standing on cement blocks about one foot off of the ground. John said, " befor' I put a ditch 'round the place the water would cover the floor in the house." It was unpainted, and covered with old galvanized tin. There were several windows in the house with glasses in them, the rest were board shutters. All around the yard and under the house there was debris of all description. A few banana tries were growing near the house, On the side and in front was foliage. There were screen doors to keep out insects which were plentiful in this low land. Over the gate he had three home made wind mills whose figures cut [ca ers?] when the wind caused them to revolve. Close to the house there was a shed erected on four cypress poles, covered with a discarded bed spring, over which were old tin and boards, on the platform, was a dilapidated chair, and an old automobile seat. John said, " here is where I rest my weary bones after a hard days work."

There are four rooms and a long porch walled in. The interior is filled with inespensive inexpensive furniture, and the walls are covered with newspaper. The floors were bare. In the front room there is a very high bed, tables and chairs, with an old out of date piano sitting in the corner. There were two more bed room with very little space except for the bed. He said, " that no one was able 3 to play the piano, it just sits there in the corner.

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stating that the devilish thing was too heavy. “ only yistidy I had to go under the house, and block it up, too much weight on the floor.”

The little boy and girl, who were shabily shabbily dress were peeping in the front door, trying to see what was going on. The boy was claded in overalls, and the little girl had on a red blocked blouse with a white dress that was very soiled; they both were barefooted with the black much mulch soil caked on their feet. Suddenly they ran from the door and climbed on the old automobile sitting in the rear of the house. On coming out of the house John spied them on the car and yelled at them, they scambled down. John said, you see d t' dld car over dar' I'se come by hit' by trading dem' two goats I had. I payed [a?] 7.50 diffunce, but I am still in de hole. The man brought on of dem' goats back. De rascal beat de man, and his whole family. You know they will beat you down. He com' pretty nigh whipping me when I was taking dem to town. Man he [gave?] me a fit in the ditch between here and Lakeland. I did'nt tink' he would cut up after I sold him. In fact I did'nt tole the man how bad he was. On morning bright and early, up he goes and bring back the goat. What has puzzeled me is, since he brought back the goat, he claims I owe him one third the diffunce. All the morning I have been figuring in this yar sand if I owe him one third or one fourth. I'se know the fourth is more than the third. Maybe you can help me out.”

“You see I hardly fool with that car , ‘cause it kicks like a mule. It takes the whole family to start it. I has to block dese hind wheels to keep the fool thing from running away. With disgust he stated, oh well dats what a feller gets for being so big. W'en I had my goats I did'nt have any trouble, only the fool 4 things w'ud run away when it rained. Dey tricked me once in Lakeland. It was raining hard and dey ran under a house with vegetables, wagon and all.”

All of a sudden a peculiar noise like “He haw! he haw! came from out of the air. John said, “shut up.” He walked around the house near the railroad on the south, and there was a Jack in the pasture. He looked up when we approached him. “ See mister Uncle Sam, dats my life saver, after all of dem jimswingers did'nt work I found a Jack dat W'ud.” He can cut

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pull a freight train, and now I go and come from Lakeland with out any trouble. He only balked on me but once, when I tried to whip him. He liked to kicked [dat?] piece of wagon to pieces. I hav'nt whipped him since. You see I can't get another wagon. He can pull a plow too, strong as an ox.”

John was full of smiles all the time he was talking, with his felt hat on his head, patched pants, and an old blue coat worn over a sweater, with brogan turned up at the end. He still showing what a wonderful place he owned.

“ [You?] see I cum a long way to get here, I was born in Knox- ville, Tenn, May 15th, 1877. My parents were George and [Minnie?] Write. I hain't got no estimation how long I lives in Tennessee. I know nothin' bout my cu'sin, an'ty, and nobody. I lived in Forsyth, Monroe County., Georgia, and picked cotton. Don't know when I cum to Florida, only been here thirty eight yer's. My oldest child is thirty nine ye'rs old. (Lilly May) [.?]brought her here when she was young. How many chillun I had, you mean how many chillun I know about. Man I know about eighteen chillun was born, som'thing like dat. Now listen mister Uncle Sam, don't push me too close, 'cause Ise can't give ' count of all dem chillun.

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Some born in the woods. Dem dat is lawful I'se tell ' bout. By my first wife [Isabelle?] had ten chillun. Dar was eight stolen, 'countin dem not lawful. ““I married Isabelle Hawkin at Lake Park, Georgia. Don't know what Ye'r or nuthin if I had to be hung. She was bred and born dar. I married Susan Green, right out of that house over dar to the north.”

John entered the house and brought fourth a box decorated with holly. In this box he had papers that was valuable to him. With pride he attempted to show them - a certificate of Ordination for deacon in the Mt Zion Church and pictures of his children. I could not name all of them, you know a man has been sick a long time he is bound to be [addle?] minded. Now dis is Lillie Mae Love, now minnie Lee Willie, and John Wesly Wright, don't dat rascal

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look like me, very spit of me. Dis is Arthur Wright, Oscilina Wright, Clifford Wright, Pearline and George, (deceased.) I got lost from dem, I don't know where dey is.”

“ You see mister Uncle Sam, you are one of his boys, dats why I call you dat, when I was young I played a banjo and gambled. Yes sir, I did dat. High life all my life- made lots of money picking banjo, and singing the blues; made a feller move a foot if he did'nt want to. Since then I turned christian, I has done great work. I was such a songster dat I was ordained. I did'nt want hit, but they made me do it. Did'nt know a word in the song, but I c'ud carry a tune. I w'ud come home and pick it out, and after a while I got to know em all. Come out some time and hear me sing dem spirituals. Hit will do you good. You know I can do a little of everything and do it well.”

“I did'nt have any schooling at all, all I learned, I learned since I was ordained for a deacon. My parents died while I was young and I had to go to work.”

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“ I make a living selling vegetables [pealing?] from [house?] to house in [La eland?]. You see I push a little music to [dem?] when I goes 'round. Like dis, here [cum'?] you vegetable man, I got dem today, [co ar gr ens?], go hers, and etc. Dey [came?] to the gate when I [start?] to sing. I [?] from three [and four dollars a day?] if I [had?] dem lazy rascals setting 'round [dem places in town?] I w'ud show them how to farm. [Hit ain't a says work in?] their bones. I git and go 'en I am well.

“ A few months ago I [sufere?] with high [blood pressure?]. I tried to [crank?] that [old Lizzie?] (Ford Car) and it 'caused me to have [hemmoraghes?]. Dr. D.J. Simpson attended me. They fust [tu?] me to the hospital, and after staying [dar?] for two days, dey brought me home. I am getting 'long nicely now, as long as I leave dat Lizzie a lone. [Dit's need?] a starter in it. [?] it can sit there and rust before I will crank it again. [My married?] (his wife's cousin) she keeps well, [and them little?] brats they are tough as what leather.”

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John stepped into the side porch, where six [?] were hanging [cleaned and ready?] to sell. “ Why buy my meat when plenty is running wild in the woods. “ The hides from the [coons?] were stretched on the back of the house. I sometime get from two to three [dollars?] piece for dem. I ketch dem by first ramming a long stick in the gopher hole to see if a rattle snake is in the hole. It is said that they will make their winter home in [a?] gopher hole. If nothin is in the hole, I reach down and out comes the gopher. I ketch possum the same way I ketches coon in dem [trees?] over der.” He had a few gophers lying on floor, which he takes to town to sell, stating that, “lots of people makes “gopher stew” out of dem.” He said, “ [He?] gets twenty five cents a peice for them.” There were 7 several bunches of collard greens tied up ready to take to town.

His wife Susan, came out from the kitchen with several pieces of coon cut up, showing me how fat he was, and preparing to cook them. She said, “their meat was good and tender.” Susan was very quiet and had very little to say. The kitchen was not as clean as the other part of the house. There were signs of soot on the walls from the small wood stove in the corner. The pots and pans were black, and the dishes were lying around on the table.

John was asked the priviledge of having his picture taken. Calling, “Mamma, come an' take your picture wid the Jack and all, so Uncle can send for us, I am ready to go.”

The Jack was hitched to the dilapidated wagon, boarded on the side to hold in the vegetables. The harness was mostly made out to ropes with a leather strap running beneath for a belly band. The lines were heavy ropes. He had a piece of holly with red and green Christmas decorations he had picked up in town with which he decorated the head of the Jack. Mamma, and the two children climbed in the wagon and tried to look their best. John tried to look important and the Jack stood perfectly still awaiting a command.

After taking the picture, he tied the Jack to the fence, and showed me his artisian well located near the house. This well is plugged and from it he is able to irrigate his little farm

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during the dry spell. John said[,] “If he unplugged it the water would shoot fifty feet or more in the air from the force of the well.

John was asked if he ever voted. He said “W what's that.” After explaining, he laughed and said, “ you know this is Polk County, and that is white folkes business, not mine.”

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John's said, “he only ate two meals a day, he buys some time fat bacon in town, most of his meat comes from the wild animals caught in the traps. He grows all the vegetables they consume on the place. Such as, turnip greens, collards, cabbages, beets, onions, radishes, mustards, and peas. He liked corn bread, and plenty of syrup to go with it. At a distance could be seen his cane patch from which he makes his syrup.

He said, “ I am considered the best truck grower in this section. I will have good strawberries, there is one acre set out in strawberries. He further said [?] that people put stuff in the earth but dey don't know how to get it out.”

“ Well I hav'nt been on relief since you left some years ago. After you showed me what to do I have been independent of it. As long as I can keep dem Goats and Jack, I will be O.K. You see besides Mamma, that Jack is my best friend, anything [dat?] help you to live is your friend. Lot's of folks don't look at hit dat way, I dose.”

In his crude way of living he is very proud of his success. There is no radio, electricity, or any of the modern conviences. His outhouse is a shackly built place with a burlap sack hanging in front. He burns oil lamps at night, and secures his heat from old coal pots. In leaving he still insisted that I would come to his church and hear him sing. “ After I work hard all of the week I enjoy myself, going to church. We have a good time singing and praying. Please come out and hear us.”